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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4837  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6024  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 4320  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0078  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 6787  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 4080  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0707  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 7640  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0472  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 2675  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0805  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0165  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0019  
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 8917  
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 7100  
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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: AMORIM FLIES TO MIDDLE EAST AS ISRAEL  
FACES BLISTERING CRITICISM

REF: 08 BRASILIA 1685

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Reactions in Brazil to the crisis in Gaza continue (reftel) to focus almost exclusively on the suffering of the Palestinian population caused by Israel's response to HAMAS' attacks while at the same time minimizing Israel's concerns over its security. Criticism of Israel from political leaders, media outlets, and government officials, have ranged from radical to moderate (or, from calling Israel's actions "state terrorism" to "disproportionate"); pro-Israeli voices are essentially non-existent outside of the local Jewish community. The ruling Workers Party (PT) has been the most critical of Israel's actions, comparing Israel's attacks to Nazism. The government, led by the Foreign Ministry (Itamaraty), has taken a moderate tone, deploring Israel's ground incursion into Gaza, but consistently stressing that a viable peace requires the recognition of Israel's right to exist and to live in peace. Itamaraty is also taking advantage of the crisis to stake a claim to participate in any resolution of the crisis, after gaining a seat at the peace table at Annapolis; since the crisis started, Foreign Minister Amorim has worked the phones with foreign capitals, organized a shipment of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and announced a round of shuttle diplomacy to Israel, the West Bank, Syria and Jordan that will take place from 11-13 January. End Summary.

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Views range from radically anti-Israeli (e.g Workers Party)...  
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¶2. (U) On January 7, the PT released an official statement signed by national party chairman, Federal Deputy Ricardo Berzoini calling Israel's actions in Gaza "state terrorism" for causing the death of innocent civilians. The statement also rejected Israel's justification of self-defense, noting that "retaliation cannot be aimed at civilians." The statement further compared Israel's actions to Nazism. Other members of the PT, such as the head of the Chamber of

Deputies Brazil-Arab Countries Caucus Nilson Mourao (PT-Acre), called Israel's actions "genocide" against the Palestinian people. Mourao and Senator Cristovam Buarque (PDT-Federal District) met with the Israeli Embassy on Wednesday, January 7 to call for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and for it to halt military actions.

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...to pro-Palestinian (e.g most news outlets)...  
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¶3. (U) The conflict has been covered extensively by Brazilian media; explicit shots of dead children, lines of corpses, and scenes of general destruction and mayhem are frequent front-page fodder. Stories have focused on Israel's actions and have tended to downplay Israel's efforts to minimize civilian casualties or Israel's efforts to provide humanitarian relief. While news coverage below the fold and inside the paper tended to focus more on the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian population, opinion columns offered a more balanced mix of views. Balanced coverage, however, usually comes when running pieces by foreign authors such as Thomas Friedman, rather than local pundits and analysts.

¶4. (U) Reaction among the large Arab community and other organizations that support the Palestinian cause in Brazil has been vocal, with protests held in Sao Paulo, Florianopolis, Brasilia, and others scheduled for Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Curitiba and other Brazilian cities, but so

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far its protests have been small. A protest in Sao Paulo gathered an estimated 400 protesters, a fairly small gathering considering that the Arab community in Sao Paulo numbers in the millions.

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...to essentially moderate (e.g. Itamaraty, Planalto, PSDB)  
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¶5. (U) Planalto Palace and Itamaraty have taken more moderate tones, with Itamaraty being the most balanced of the two. (Comment: Itamaraty realizes that in order to further Brazil's goal of enhancing its role as a player in Middle East peace talks it has to strike a balanced tone. End comment.) Echoing the PT's criticism of Israel, President Lula's foreign policy advisor (and long-time PT-stalwart) Marco Aurelio Garcia asserted that Israel's actions "against civilians" amounted to "state terrorism." At the same time, Garcia took pains to add that Israel is or should be "untouchable" and that Brazil's commitment to Israel's right to exist and to live in peace among its neighbors is uncompromising. Further, to highlight Brazil's neutrality, he noted that President Lula's long-in-the-works visit to Israel should take place this year.

¶6. (U) Since the beginning of the crisis, Itamaraty has worked the phones with his counterparts in European, and Middle Eastern capitals, and issued essentially anodyne statements noting Brazil's concerns over the humanitarian situation and calling for a ceasefire and an international conference involving neutral countries. Despite these more moderate statements, Brazilian officials have not missed an opportunity to criticize the United States for failing in its role as a peace broker. Both Lula and Amorim named the United States the key stumbling block to achieving a ceasefire as a result of what they have called United States' being reflexively pro-Israeli, an obstacle that has to be overcome if breakthrough is to be achieved. Peace will be achieved, according to both Lula and Amorim, if "neutral" countries such as Brazil have a bigger role in the peace process.

¶7. (U) Among the major four political parties, the only other one to have issued an official statement was the opposition

Brazilian Social Democracy party (PSDB), which criticized the PT's statement, called the crisis in Gaza complex, and noted that Brazil has traditionally maintained a posture of neutrality in the conflict and that maintaining such a posture is important if Brazil is to act as an honest broker in this conflict.

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Staking Claim to Peace Table with Round of Shuttle Diplomacy  
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18. (U) Itamaraty is aggressively positioning itself to continue or expand on the role it gained in the peace process when it was invited to participate in the Annapolis conference in 2007. Since the conflict started, Foreign Minister Amorim has been on the phone with Secretary Rice, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, with the Arab League, EU president Barroso, and with the Foreign Ministers of Israel, France, Egypt, Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, and Syria.

Brazil is also shipping 14 tons of food and medicine and Amorim announced plans to visit several Middle Eastern capitals from 11-13 January. He will meet in Damascus with Syrian president Bashar al Assad and Foreign Minister Wallid Muallem, then travel on the same day to Jerusalem to meet with Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni, followed with stops in Ramallah to meet with Palestinian Authority head

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Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayaad, and ending on the 13 January with a stop in Amman, to meet with King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Bashir.

SOBEL